

# FACT SHEET

## Senior Hunger

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### Older NJ Residents Need Nutrition Assistance

About 12 percent of New Jersey's older adults faced hunger in 2018 – translating to more than 243,000 residents age 60 and older did not have enough food to eat, according to [Feeding America](#).

The state ranked an alarming 45<sup>th</sup> nationwide for its high rate of senior hunger, according to [Meals on Wheels 2020 State Fact Sheet](#).

Across the country, the rate of hunger among seniors has more than doubled since 2001, according to the National Council on Aging. And it is expected to climb even higher as Baby Boomer age.

These seniors regularly face the terrible choice of buying food, paying the electric bill or paying for medications. People with disabilities face similar hardships.

Hunger hurts the health of our senior citizens – and causes increased spending on health care and medications. Seniors without enough to eat are more likely to suffer from chronic health conditions, including depression, heart failure, diabetes and asthma, studies show. Other research has found that food-insecure seniors had

#### Recommendation

**CHANGE STATE POLICIES TO MAKE IT EASIER FOR SENIOR CITIZENS TO QUALIFY FOR FEDERAL FOOD ASSISTANCE.**

lower intakes of vital nutrients and were twice as likely to be in poor or fair health than those who had adequate diets.

This translates to higher spending on expensive medical interventions that could be prevented with a nutritious diet. Hunger becomes even more acute when out-of-pocket medical expenses rise, often consuming large portions of seniors' monthly income -- money that might otherwise be spent on groceries.

#### **SNAP is a Good Investment**

The New Jersey Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, NJ SNAP (also known as food stamps), can improve the nutrition and health of both seniors and people with disabilities. By providing this assistance, seniors and people with disabilities are more likely to be able to afford the food

that can keep them healthy and functioning.

SNAP also helps the economy, pumping \$1.2 billion into our local communities each year.

Yet many struggling seniors are missing out on this food assistance. A [Hunger Free New Jersey report](#) found that just half of older low-income adults received NJ SNAP in 2019.

Changing state policies to make it easier for seniors to apply for and receive SNAP makes sense from a human, health and fiscal perspective.

#### Changes should include:

- Streamlining the application process,
- Conducting outreach to ensure all eligible seniors have access to SNAP,
- Implementing a standard medical deduction to make more struggling seniors eligible.

Providing seniors with healthy food helps to reduce illness and medical costs, while providing a better quality of life for our oldest residents. Now is the time to act. Our senior citizens deserve better.



#### Senior Hunger Facts

**Nationally, one in six older Americans struggle with food insecurity.**

**In New Jersey:**

**NJ ranks 24<sup>th</sup> nationwide for seniors at risk of social isolation.**

**27% of NJ seniors live below the poverty line.**

Source: Meals on Wheels, New Jersey Fact Sheet, 2020

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**Hunger Free New Jersey** changes policy and practice so every New Jersey resident has enough to eat, every single day.

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